1:Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
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614 718 784 (c) *As the Naterari or Village Tabu Post.* The *heratu* appears again in its most interesting character as the village tabu post. In many parts of the Territory it is the custom long before a feast to set up some tangible sign of tabu upon the coco-nuts. Among the Orokaiva this sign commonly takes the form of a wooden post or pillar, roughly carved and painted, and this post should properly speaking be of that particular wood which the clan owns for its *heratu*. This, however, cannot be a universal rule, because the *heratu* is often a grass or some small plant; but it may be said that when the *heratu* is a tree the tabu post is a stump of that tree. (In the other cases it may be a post of some alternative wood, or—a frequent substitute—one or two wands of the very light timber called *pamba* tied horizontally to a palm.)

Among the Aiga such a post is called *naterari*, and this word will be used as an alternative for tabu post. The *naterari* will be described more fully in Chapter XIII, but I may here anticipate one or two points in that description because they throw some light on the nature of the *heratu*.

614 718 784 769 In the first place the feast for which the *naterari* is set up is a mortuary feast; it is in honour of, or placation of, certain departed spirits. Further, offerings are made to it as if to the departed spirits; it is hung about with mementos of the dead; the feast is laid out before it, and it is called upon to witness the food; it is treated and disposed of with something like reverence; lastly, it often bears a faint and sometimes a decided anthropomorphic character. These various points show that the *naterari* is closely associated with the dead man, and they do much to justify the suggestion that the wooden pillar actually represents the dead, or even that it stood originally as a crude model.

### *The Heratu as Ancestor*

614 718 Having described the uses of the *heratu* I may now endeavour to explain them. The fact of first importance is that the *heratu* of the clan is constantly referred to as 'our ancestor'. The words used are *evobo* and *abije*; the former (which in this connexion is the usual one) seems always to

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
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happily of a less dangerous and disagreeable character. 794X
This was the Taro cult, of which a brief summary may be given here in order that the subsequent discussion of its details may be better understood.

It originated near the mouth of the river Mambare rather more than ten years ago, whence it spread throughout the Orokaiva people. The name 'Taro cult' has now established itself in Papua, though it may perhaps give a false impression regarding the movement as a whole. Taro or *ba* is the staple food of the Orokaiva, who are, like most of the peoples of Papua, almost wholly dependent on their gardens.

The new cult came into existence through the visions 794X
of an individual who believed himself possessed actually 787
by the spirits of the taro. In constant communication with them, he received their instructions as to the various rites which would ensure an ample crop in the gardens; and these rites, which were simple and, through their appeal to the stomachs of his followers, agreeable, quickly developed into a popular cult. The whole of this ceremonial was originally directed toward the placation of the taro spirits, and the name 'Taro cult', or worship of the taro, was not incorrectly applied.

But taro worship has not succeeded in spreading very 794X
far without a marked and significant change. The ritual 769
indeed has remained substantially the same, but throughout the great majority of the Orokaiva people it is intended for a placation, not of the taro spirits, but of the spirits of ancestors or departed relatives, who are believed to control the growth of the taro. The significance of this change will be discussed at greater length in another place. But it must be understood that the Taro cult in its modern and most commonly accepted form is not a worship of the taro, but rather of the dead. It retains its close association with the taro, however, in this way, viz. that the various rites are expressly meant to ensure, through the medium of the spirits of the dead, a prosperous taro crop. It is thus at once a fertility cult and a cult of the dead.

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
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crocodile, cuscus, fire-fly, for example—which haunts the bush, and is regarded as dangerous and, on the whole, abominable, but which must not be offended. It is not necessary to deal at any length with this subject of animal reincarnation, which is not relevant to the matter in hand. The spirit of the dead manifests itself in other ways. It may visit the village unseen by human eye; or it may come and stand over the sleeper in his dreams, speak to him, and leave objects of a very tangible nature by his side.

The practical aspect of the old-time Orokaiva religion is largely a placation of the spirits of the dead. It is in the garden that the good results become evident; consequently we find—quite apart from the new cult of Taro—a number of rites or observances which are intended to ensure, through the medium of the spirits of the dead, a greater output in the gardens. The more striking of these observances may be enumerated. In the villages are to be seen the *karau*, or offertory platforms (sometimes with a miniature ladder from the ground which is meant to facilitate the spirit's access to the morsels of decaying food which have been left for it). At the feast and dance the spirit of the dead man in whose honour they are performed is called upon to be present and partake. When a man dies his spirit, accompanied by numerous others, is known sometimes to return almost immediately to his garden to play havoc with the taro in a sort of huff; and, indeed, it is a practice to lie in wait for these ghostly vandals, in the hope that they may be overheard discussing the sorcerer who brought about the death and so permit of identification and revenge. Again, for some reason which was never satisfactorily explained, the garden of the deceased is taboo to his nearest relatives: they fear some malign influence of the spirit upon the vegetables. Lastly, at the actual burial, some old man will stand by the corpse as it lies before the open grave, and pressing with his foot upon that of the dead man as if to secure his attention will cry out,

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
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'Begone now to a good place, not an ill one; a place where there are no march flies nor mosquitoes; where there are pigs in plenty, and taro in plenty. Send us pigs, and send us taro, and we will make thee a feast'. Instances such as these will show that the native believes his food supply to be governed, or at least influenced, by the spirits of the dead, and that accordingly he has at least one practical reason for seeking their goodwill. It may be said definitely that, before the advent of the Taro cult, the Orokaiva looked to the spirits of his dead for the prosperity of his garden, not to the spirits of the taro itself.

It is necessary to consider briefly the native conception of a 'spirit'. The words *binei*, *sovai*, &c. (p. 25) stand generally for the being which in one form or another continues to exist after the death and burial of the body. It includes rather than coincides with the word 'ghost', as it covers a variety of conceptions, from the unseen and unsubstantial entities who climb the little ladders and dine imperceptibly upon the food offerings, to the reincarnated animals and reptiles of the forest or stream, or further, to the indescribable monsters who abduct men and women, scatter their wits, and leave them to wander in the bush. But all these conceptions have this much in common, that they belong to the life after death.

Now the Taro cult has spread abroad another word. *atiti*; or rather it has added a new meaning to this word Aiga informants and others far removed from the original home of the cult sometimes nowadays use the word *atiti* as synonymous with the being who survives death. But in the Orokaiva tongue *atiti* stands for shadow, reflection, or the mere appearance of anything, be it dead or alive. It does not necessarily imply death, nor does it cover the same vivid concept as *sovai* or *binei*. The new use of the word arises from a misunderstanding. It is acknowledged to belong, in this sense, to the Taro vocabulary, i.e. to a set of terms which have been made popular by the new cult and are used freely by those who only half understand them (vide pp. 39, 48). Buninia dreamed

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his success in gardening and hunting. Panjari awoke from his sleep with these medicines, or at least the knowledge of them, in his possession, and in due course had passed them on to my informant. But the disciple cuts no ice without an inspiration of his own; so my informant in his turn receives dream visits from his own parents, and together they go into the gardens by night to beat the drums and sing, to make *tinogu*, as they call it, amid the taro. Another old man of the same village, anxious to bear out the evidence of his friend, declared he had heard this mysterious *tinogu*, and had screwed up his courage to the point of investigating it: before he came near enough to see the performers, however, they had taken flight and scattered. That the dead drummers were really in the garden is hardly more improbable than that a native should have ventured to investigate anything so spookish. But both stories, although hovering strangely between belief and fantasy, indicate that the concern of the Taro man is here with the spirits of the dead, not of the taro. So, again, we hear a Taro man crying as he holds up the shoot before planting,

*Aiaka, mamaka, apije*
Mother, father, grandfather
*Ba nato kundo-gumbu*
taro mine bring
*Durate bureda piata unani*
Set down in the garden, grant.

And we see, in the *ba oro*, or meeting-houses of the Taro men, little racks or platforms with food offerings, which they tell you are for the spirits of the dead. Lastly, in his subsidiary role of doctor, we see the Taro man, having practised all his remedies to no avail, setting up a spear with a bundle of rich ornaments for a placatory offering to the *sowai* who is afflicting the patient.

Such instances could easily be multiplied, but these are enough to show the trend which Taro medicine has taken. The original doctrine of the taro spirit seems to have survived principally in the neighbourhood of the

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
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of the fertilizer. The first component of the magical complex is simply wishing; the second, perhaps, is expressing the wish in speech. Thus we hear the gardener using strange exclamations, imitative and hortatory, as he plants. First, as he drives his pointed digging-stick into the sodden earth he ejaculates or simply mutters, '*sigigigi* . . . !' with a rapid following on of the syllables which completely baffles the European who tries to imitate. As the same meaningless word is used when the spear sinks into the flank of the pig, it is presumably a sort of onomatope, and meant by the gardener to make easier the sinking of his stick into the ground. When he sometimes says 'Brrrr . . .' it is perhaps with the same vague idea.

As he plants the taro he may apostrophize it: *O ba erejo*, 'Taro arise!' by which he means that the leaves should sprout up quickly; or, *O ba beji*, 'Taro be hungry!' i.e. be greedy and take nourishment from the soil; or *O ba anumbejo*, 'Taro sit!' i.e. let the tuber sit comfortably and firmly in the ground. He will also *Aja ba*, 'Mother taro!' by which he may mean that the plant should be prolific and put forth many offsets, or perhaps simply, as some explain it, 'What a whopper!'

Similarly as he plants sugar-cane he will mutter, '*Poruporuporu* . . . !' with the same inimitable rapidity. This is a conventional exclamation and was never explained to me; but as the large bamboo is called *Poru*, it may well enough have meant originally that the stalks of the sugar-cane should grow up like those of the much larger bamboo which they resemble. Again, as he thrusts the cutting into the ground he may be heard making luscious sucking noises between his teeth, 'Sip, sip', and coughing, as if he were already enjoying the sweet juice of the sugar-cane in his own unutterably noisy manner, and half choking himself in his eagerness.

In the old life of the Orokaiva there seem to be no large ceremonies in which the direct idea is that of fertility. There is, however, a strong conviction that

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
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241 789 769 the spirits of the dead can influence the crops for good or ill. Hence to some extent come the practices of placating the dead with offerings (especially on small platforms, or *barau*, set up in the actual gardens) and of exhorting the dead man just before burial to depart to a good place where there are pigs in plenty and taro in plenty, whence he may send pigs and taro to his surviving friends. Again, for some reason which remains obscure, the garden of the dead man is tabooed to his immediate friends, though it may be used by others. In general it is felt that the spirits of the dead can prosper the gardens or blast them, and it is worth while using all possible tact to avoid the latter alternative.

241 794 769 Within the last few years, however, a movement popularly known as the 'Taro cult' has swept through the whole of the Orokaiva country. As I have dealt with this movement in another report, it will not be necessary to make more than a passing reference to it here. Near the home of the cult, viz. about the mouth of the Mambare, it would seem that the original idea has held its ground: it is a cult of the spirit of the taro. But over the greater part of the Division the new movement has adapted itself in a very significant way to old belief. It is no longer a cult of the taro itself, but of the spirits of the dead who make the taro grow. The ceremonial, although constantly altered in some minor point by local Taro men, who desire merely to go one better than those from whom they have acquired it, has remained substantially the same. It consists especially of the *kasamba* (the singing, to the accompaniment of drums and conches, of songs which are meant to make the taro prosper); of feasting and entertaining with certain formalities and the use of special utensils; of treating the plants with certain medicines; of observing certain food taboos; sometimes of dancing; and always of simulating or surrendering to various kinds of bodily seizures. All these things are supposed to make the taro grow. In the whole cult, which with rare exceptions has been

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
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adopted by all the Orokaiva, there appears to be hardly any special practice that could in any way benefit the taro crop. Nevertheless, despite certain very undesirable features, the Taro cult does no serious amount of harm to those who practise it in moderation, and may perhaps actually benefit the taro in so far as it causes, if possible, more attention to be paid to the plant and its cultivation.

As there are magical methods used for the benefit of the gardens there are others which may be used, clandestinely, to its detriment. There is a tale of a village whose gardens failed again and again, despite all the industry of the villagers. Discouraged and mystified they decide to leave a small boy to watch for the putative sorcerer. Concealed under a pile of firewood the little spy observes a *sovai*—a devil-devil—decked with leaves and grass come dancing into the garden. He is hideously skinny and ugly, and as he performs his ungainly dance he sings *Utu nauko, kobo nauko, ebu tungako*, 'Like my leg, like my arm, like the neck of a drum', meaning that the taro will be poor and shrivelled, like his own scrawny limbs, or the slender grip of the drum which he beats. This, like most native stories, has a happy ending. The villagers lie in wait, and on his next appearance the *sovai* is seized, dispatched, and cast into a deep water, after which the gardens prosper as they should.

Whenever things go wrong unexplicably the native is prone to impute his misfortunes to a sorcerer. No doubt sorcery is supposed to be practised a hundred times more often than it is really practised. But there is one rather cunning method which may serve as an example of black magic at work in the garden. When a man finds that a thief has been making free with his taro, sugar-cane, or whatever it may be, he will look about for some remains of the stolen food, and then setting upright in the ground a length of springy stick, he will hold this fragment of food against the upper end, and, bending the stick back, shoot it out of the garden as if by means of a catapult. The effect of this is to make the thief a waster,

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be somewhat later in starting work, but they do their share. There are very few slackers in an Orokaiva village. As has been indicated, there is no effective division of labour in the garden save that between the sexes, and, to a less extent, that between old and young. There are incipient traces of trades and special vocations among the Orokaiva, but in gardening there is virtually no such differentiation. Every man, unless he be aged or a cripple, has his own garden, and he and his wife and children support themselves.

Sometimes the whole clan will co-operate. This is seen especially when a move is made and work begun on a new area. Sometimes by invitation another village will come to assist in these initial operations. This is the nearest approach that the Orokaiva makes to the African working bee. Passing at noon through the village of Ohoraburari—so named because the 'dance of the rooster' was once performed there—we see the women already busy, and a great array of black pots on the fires. A little farther and we come to the new garden clearing, where we find at work the whole population, men and women, of a neighbouring village, Totoimaburari, 'the dance of Totoima', the legendary mankiller. Working with them are a few of the Ohoraburari people—such as are not more interested in helping prepare the feast for their paying guests.

The work proceeds steadily, but with little system. There is nothing like a drive, or a rank of men moving forward and working abreast; but rather a number of scattered individuals, engaged in a somewhat aimless and leisurely kind of dibbling. On the edge of the garden is a platform, shoulder high, with a miniature ladder from the ground. This is the *baraw*, or *ba gaga*, the platform on which offerings are set for the spirits of the dead, who govern the taro crop; and the ladder is intended in some manner to facilitate their access to the offerings. On this occasion the *baraw* is hung about with tufts of the brilliant feathers which make up the Orokaiva head-

4: Chinnery & Haddon E-5 (ca. 1915) 1917
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# FIVE NEW RELIGIOUS CULTS IN BRITISH NEW GUINEA.

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## I.

### E. W. P. CHINNERY.

I HAVE recently been engaged in observing the origin of two religous cults known as "Kava-Keva" and "Kekesi." They are animistic practices that, notwithstanding their prohibition, have already become powerful, and extend from the Gira River (8° S. lat.) to Buna Bay.[1]

The belief in ghosts and spirits is a predominant characteristic of the northern native. In almost every tribe I have observed the propitiation of family ghosts with individual offerings of food by ordinary persons to secure the vitality of their food supply, and by sorcerers to stimulate their charms. Ghosts are invoked during ceremonies by divination to reveal crimes and criminals. Food offerings to ghosts are made during death feasts and during certain initiation rites. The house of initiation and the paraphernalia of the dance are believed to have spiritual powers, and when the paraphernalia are thrown into the river at the completion of the rites, they are invoked to smite the enemies of the dancers.

Yet, although the spirits and ghosts are legion, I had nowhere come across any conception of a supreme spirit until the outbreak of the Kava-Keva[2] movement, when the villages

[1] It may be well to note that the Gira River opens at about 8° S. lat. on the north coast of British New Guinea, and that the mouth of the Mamba River is four miles to the south, both being in the Mambare Division. Buna is on the south of Holnicote (Gona) Bay, about 8° 37′ S. lat., and is in the Kumusi Division. Kororo, Mount Victory, is an active volcano, nearly 5000 feet in height, a little to the west of Cape Nelson, which is about 9° S. lat.

[2] "Kava-Keva" is a Motuan word which is used extensively throughout the tribes of British New Guinea by adoption to express a condition of madness or irresponsibility either temporary or permanent.